

# Better Homes and Centers



Michigan Department of  
Social Services

Advocacy  
SPRING 1996

## PARENTS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS CAN BE A CHILD/FAMILY ADVOCACY TEAM

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A child advocate is someone working on behalf of children to meet children's rights. Children need the support of those adults who care the most for them. Children do not vote, they cannot challenge politicians, administrators or school board members. Providers and parents can develop advocacy skills together and nurture one another as they use their resources to amplify the voices of children.

Participation is the key word for success. By expecting and establishing consistent parental involvement in the home or center activities, providers can encourage a pattern of parental involvement in children's causes by sharing their views with friends and neighbors, participating in local school and community board meetings, voting, being involved in letter-writing campaigns, contacting elected officials and attending conferences.

Child care providers can enhance and strengthen parent advocacy skills and join with them to raise awareness of the needs of children. They can improve the well-being of children by actively promoting positive child/family policies and practices in the community as well as creating positive change at the local, state and federal policy-making levels.

Advocacy at home includes nurturing and providing for the total child, including the child's physical, social/emotional, and intellectual development. Providers can help parents realize that the most important gift they can give their child is the gift of time. Parents should be encouraged to talk with their children at home, to listen to what their children have to say, and make time to play with and enjoy their child.

In the school setting, providers should encourage parents to be a part of the educational partnership between the child, parent, caregiver/teacher and administrator. By working together for the total development of the child, everyone benefits. Parents can advocate for their child by visiting the school, talking to the teacher, joining

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Advocacy is not a bad word! Advocacy is defined as "active support, as a cause, idea or policy". This concept applied to child care embodies the principle of being involved on behalf of children who are in need of child care. Michigan's child care program has enjoyed the benefits of strong child care community advocacy from educators, public and private agencies, specific advocacy groups and individuals, child care providers and parents.

Advocacy is, of course, at its best when all the major interests work together for a common purpose. When a program affecting the protection and well-being of children is threatened, the strength of an advocate's intervention makes the difference. A direct result of the combined efforts of various advocacy groups is to successfully inform, educate or influence change. Such a coalition of advocates is motivated by what is best for the population served, not what is best for the organization responsible to deliver the program.

The Month of the Young Child® is a good example of events and activities for providers of quality child care. Open houses and newspaper articles are only a few ways to help educate neighbors, the community and legislative leaders as to what quality child care is all about.

Children's lives are shaped significantly by their experiences in child care. Quality child care helps to make those experiences positive ones. Advocacy and active support can make the difference in enhancing the lives of literally thousands of Michigan's children in child care settings.

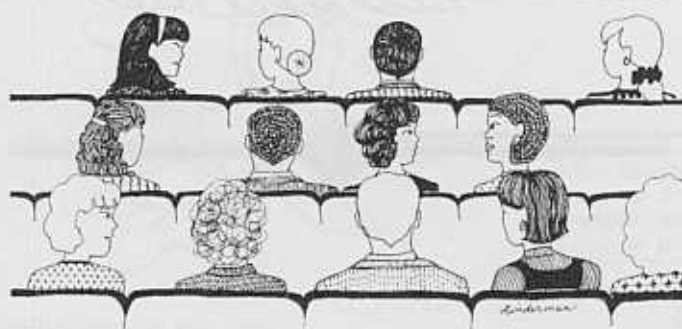


Parent-Teacher associations, attending conferences and other school activities. Once again, the key word is participation. Providers need to include parents in the planning process of activities. People are more likely to participate if they feel they have contributed to this process.

In the community, provider and parents need to attend local board meetings, investigate what resources are available in the community and learn about the local programs that address health/safety issues. Local libraries and Chambers of Commerce are good starting points to discover what other groups might be working on at the local level. Providers and parents can share information and keep current about children's needs and services and local activities through posters, newsletters or bulletin boards at the child care setting. Providers can bring in speakers for parent meetings and provide time to discuss children's rights, needs and issues. The key is to communicate with parents as the issues arise.

In the area of policy-making, parents and child care providers can make a strong impact on the well-being of children. The actions of policy-makers can and do strongly affect the lives of children. As interested citizens, parents and child care providers can become informed. They need to get the facts. Providers and parents should share their viewpoints with family, friends and neighbors. These views can be further shared by speaking out at local meetings, writing letters or making phone calls to their elected officials. They can contact newspapers, radio and television stations. They can attend local or national conferences that focus on children. Most importantly, parents and providers can become registered voters and

vote for



candidates who really do support issues which concern children. Knowledge is power. It is important to decide who is truly "for kids". Parents and providers can give the children a "voice" by voting and by letting their legislator know where they stand on issues.

Parents and child care providers alike, can become "vocal" voters. The steps are simple:

1. Recognize an issue;
2. Decide what needs to be done;
3. Take action.

By sharing perspectives, parents and child care providers can start to form coalitions with other concerned people. One "voice" can make a difference and several "voices" can make an even stronger impact. There is strength in numbers. Legislators do want to hear from their constituents. In the present political climate, they especially want to hear from parents. To insure that the message is heard, keep in mind that individually written letters carry more weight than form letters. What parents and child care providers have to say is important, so be sure to type or write clearly. Content is crucial! State the position and give clear reasons to support it. Specifically cite a particular bill or resolution number, if possible. Include questions such as, "How do you feel about this?" or ask that specific information be sent. Questions and requests encourage a legislator to respond to letters they receive. *Dare to participate. After all, it is the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.*

*Please send articles for consideration in  
future issues to:*

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## EFFECTIVE POLITICAL ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Steve Manchester  
Michigan AEYC

I'm expected to discuss effective, political child advocacy in 2,000 words; as an African proverb says, that's like trying to put an elephant in a jar — but here goes.

### Effective Advocacy Has Three Parts

Effective advocacy has three parts: (1) Using "nuts and bolts" information — the names and addresses of policy makers; voting records; the language of a bill or law; and so on — to communicate with officials; (2) Participation in awareness-raising programs such as Month of the Young Child® (April) or Parenting Awareness Month (March), and; (3) Speaking on behalf of children with a collective, political voice.

Child advocates do a good job with the first two parts. For example, in 1990 Congress passed the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act because child advocates flooded Washington, D.C. with letters and phone calls in support of the Act. In Michigan, a few years ago, a proposal to end licensing of child care facilities brought forth a huge response from child advocates, which led to the continuation of licensing. Regarding awareness-raising activities, advocates conduct hundreds of them annually across the state. However, while people do excellent work with the first two parts of child advocacy, they need to do better in speaking for children with a collective, political voice. Otherwise, I expect that the annual listing of dire statistics about children will continue endlessly. Let me present some statistics to make clear what's at stake.

### Some Dire Statistics; Stories of Success

Despite our child advocacy, we find that children in this state, indeed in the USA, do less well than they should. Many children are poorly protected and supported when compared with children elsewhere. A recent comparison of 17 of the world's most industrialized democracies showed that almost 22% of American children lived in poverty. The second worst nation, Australia, had 14% of its children in poverty. Other nations had the following child-poverty rates: Ireland, 12%; Israel, 11.1%; England, 9.9%; Italy, 9.6%; Belgium, 3.8%, and; Finland, with the lowest poverty rate, 2.5%. With low poverty rates, good things happen for children; they enjoy better health, receive better education and care, and suffer less abuse and neglect.

Additionally, a majority of American families have gotten poorer over the last 25 years once purchasing power is adjusted for inflation. Some two-parent families maintain family income by having both parents work, but generally American families have experienced economic decline. Many parents find it increasingly difficult to provide what they want for their children. Many children do not receive necessities that this nation and state could easily provide given our technical and eco-

omic capacities, things such as immunizations, good nutrition and decent educational opportunity. (For example, in a nation that poorly immunizes its youngest children, Michigan has the worst record of the 50 states.)

In the 20th century, the other industrialized democracies faced tough problems, at times, tougher than those faced here. They all experienced the Great Depression, most had wars waged within their borders and, until recently, all had economies much weaker than ours (some still do). Nevertheless, these nations overcame their difficulties and now have children's policies that we envy. Can we learn some lessons about child advocacy from these places?

### A Collective, Political Voice

The answer is "YES." Child advocates elsewhere succeeded because they developed a *collective, political voice on behalf of children*. By collective, I mean numerous citizens reached broad agreement on the public policies they wanted for children and parents. By political, I mean ordinary citizens decided that the economic well-being of children and parents had to be addressed by the politicians who wanted their support. By voice, I mean that this message was delivered clearly across the society and, thus, to politicians.

But, some people say, "Politicians already care about children. That's why they have their picture taken with babies." But a better test of political will, one that we should promote, would examine how many children suffer and whether such suffering is increasing or decreasing.

How would a collective, political voice help child advocates in Michigan? It would help them represent the needs of certain voters — particularly the needs of parents, grandparents and those who care for or work with children. It would give child advocates political support based on the broad agreements about the needs of children and parents. Child advocates would mobilize lots of people whose votes reflected the needs of children and parents. It would make politicians pay attention to the needs of children and parents.

### Finding Solutions as Big as the Problems

Has this kind of advocacy happened before in the USA or Michigan? YES. In the 1950s, society saw senior citizens as unimportant, somewhat foolish, dottering people whom politicians could ignore. Senior advocates developed an advocacy program that included the three parts discussed here. Seniors mobilized with a single voice and scored major political gains. A major goal of their advocacy was decreased senior poverty; they caused their poverty rate to fall from over 30% then to 6% today.

Advocates can do the same for children and parents. What would be some good steps to take to develop a political voice? I think we must decide to *advocate for solutions as big as the problems*. This requires that we look closely and honestly at difficult problems. Declining

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The Governor's Commission on Child Care also held public hearings. These hearings were held in Mt. Pleasant, Detroit and Grand Rapids. Once again, parents, providers and community leaders came to testify on the need to improve and expand the supply of quality child care services. Members of the Governor's Commission include representatives from the business community and the Michigan Women's Commission in addition to parents, child care providers and child advocates. In this way, the network of support for quality care is increased and more people have the responsibility to look at ways to improve child care services in the state.

Michigan 4C Association recently received a grant from the Children's Special Health Care Trust Fund to implement a training series in five Michigan communities to help child care providers care for children with special health care needs.

Parents, health professionals and staff from Early On, Michigan's Early Intervention system will work with 4C staff to teach these classes in communities. Through this training, providers will be given knowledge and skill and will be connected with community resources.

No single entity could do this alone. By working together, we hope to have a cadre of child care providers who work as partners with parents to provide integrated child care settings where children with special health care needs participate in child care programs to the fullest extent possible.

Yet another example of networking to improve child care services is a recent meeting of the directors of the local 4C agencies, the licensing supervisors from the Division of Day Care Licensing and key staff from the Child Care Division, Michigan Department of Social Services. These groups came together to ask the important questions: What do we hope that children and families receive from our services? What do we think that families want from us? What do we need to change to make this happen?

Recognizing that understanding is basic to respect and coalition building, we started by understanding the roles, responsibilities and limitations of each group. We also explored areas of commonality, areas of differences and areas where it would be possible to do some creative work together. Through this process, we built trust and relationships. We focused on tasks that can easily be done to improve our working relationships such as sharing newsletter articles, working together on training programs and conferences, sharing information about community resources for families.

When we build networks with other groups in the child care profession, we both support and rely on others. We all have primary responsibility for certain activities but have the strength and support of our professional networks in carrying out these responsibilities. On other occasions, we support the primary effort of another group. In this way, we build a strong network of services for children and families and benefit from working with a wide range of people interested in using their skills, talents and resources

to improve child care services. We also build trust and learn to go beyond minor differences to speak on behalf of quality child care services in a unified voice.

## NON-TRADITIONAL ALLIANCES

*Editorial Committee*

The previous articles looked at building coalitions within the child caring community. As each discussed, it is essential that these groups speak as one voice. It is equally important to broaden coalitions to include non-traditional alliances.

Other alliances are not limited to but certainly should include:

- Senior Citizen Groups
- Retired Teachers Associations
- American Medical Association
- American Dental Association
- PTO's
- Chambers of Commerce
- Service Groups such as Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs
- Religious Organizations
- Local Businesses
- Individual Employers
- Local Arts Councils
- Local Arts Groups
- Banks
- Professional Sports Organizations
- Lawyer Groups
- Local Successful Entrepreneurs

Remember, these organizations will expect your support on issues important to them.

### *(POLITICAL ADVOCACY, continued from Page 3)*

wealth for many families — the middle class as well as the poor — is a good place to start. We have to discuss money, especially since other powerful groups lobby strenuously for money. We must learn to discuss politics with average citizens, since politicians respond to what citizens want. Finally, we must believe that citizens want economic security for parents and children and will listen to a political voice that speaks to economic security.

The first step in finding a political voice requires developing an attitude that this part of child advocacy is important and will be done. After that, lots of people know how to develop a collective, political voice and would love to help develop one on behalf of children and families. That political voice, merged with the good advocacy already being done, will lead to public policies good for children.

And, it will be far easier than putting an elephant in a jar.

## NETWORKING IN THE CHILD CARE PROFESSION — REACHING OUT TO NEW PARTNERS

Margaret Crawley  
Michigan 4C Association

The challenge of supporting children and families in these changing times is great indeed and often feels overwhelming. A report from the Carnegie Foundation tells us that the quiet crisis in the lives of so many young children threatens not only themselves but also our future as a nation. The recently released *Kids Count in Michigan* reports that increasing numbers of children are living below the subsistence level and that, while most families and communities try to help their children as best they can, many struggle with a lack of resources to provide necessary supports.

One of our greatest challenges is to provide quality child care for the high proportion of young children, including infants and toddlers, being cared for outside their homes while their parents work.

Changes in federal and state budgets and policies require us to look at new ways of working together to improve services for children and their families. The need to expand child care/early childhood education programs is critical in response to welfare reform initiatives.

As parents and members of the child care profession, we can advocate for children in many ways. Because our time and resources are limited, we can be more effective if we work together to coordinate services and to speak with a stronger voice. It may be helpful to share some successful efforts to improve the availability and quality of child care.

When child care providers become licensed or registered, attend training and join provider associations, they give the message that children and families are of primary importance and worthy of excellent services. When parents seek out professional providers and show respect through good communication, appreciation and fair payments, they contribute to the overall quality of child care services. When parents and providers are supported in their efforts by members of the child care community such as licensing consultants, 4C staff, educational institutions, employers and community organizations, child care services become even stronger.

Being a member of a professional organization such as the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children or a family child care association develops professionalism and the ability to advocate on behalf of children and families. Professional organizations provide support through meetings, training sessions and publications and the opportunity to speak with a unified voice. These organizations encourage self assessment that helps improve the quality of services offered by individual providers.

Professional organizations can also work together to make a difference. Collaboration is defined as "working

together, working with, or cooperating to achieve a mutual goal." The Child Care Aware Project has identified a number of strategies to make collaborations work:

- Identify your purposes and goals. What specific outcomes do you want to accomplish?
- Enter into discussions with potential partners assuming that you want the same thing, in this case, higher quality child care.
- Remember that most potential collaborators have something to contribute to your effort. This will help you figure out how to give them the opportunity to support you.
- Think creatively. Avoid falling into the trap of thinking, "we have to agree to do it either my way or yours." Usually there are many other options.
- Remember that collaborations may not always work the way you hoped they would.

Child care organizations in Michigan have worked together in various ways during the past year to improve child care services.

The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children, Michigan's Children, the Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) Association and Michigan Head Start Association joined together to hold public hearings on child care in three Michigan communities — in Detroit, Grand Rapids and Traverse City.

Parents, child care providers, employers and community leaders came together as advocates to address the complex issue of child care. Their testimony addressed the availability, affordability and the quality of child care.

Parents reported stress at work and in training programs because of concerns over the quality of care their children receive. Child care professionals expressed concerns about the impact of unlicensed and low quality care on children and stressed the importance of training in child care and child development. Participants also stressed that partnerships will be required to achieve quality child care in communities.

When communities come together like this to share their concerns, public awareness on the issue of child care is increased and solutions to problems are discussed in an open way from a variety of perspectives.

A report on these hearings, *In Their Own Words*, was developed with the generous support of the Frey Foundation. This report captures the honest experiences of families who need child care, providers who work hard to offer good care, employers whose employees need child care and community leaders who are concerned about this very issue.

Copies of the report were distributed to members of the legislature, policy makers and members of the Governor's Commission on Child Care at a time when important decisions about the future of child care in Michigan are being made.

## SOME TIPS FOR CHILD CARE ADVOCATES WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Sara Miller, Ed.D.

Michigan 4C Association/Early On Michigan

Working with the media will require time, energy and resources. How important is this to your organization? How much time and resources will be devoted to media outreach? Honestly answering these two questions will help you develop an intensive or a not so intensive media strategy. You can simply send a well thought out and well written letter to the editor or you can have a more extensive campaign that involves regular broadcasting of Public Service Announcements on radio and television, plus newspaper feature articles and opinion/editorial pieces.

Will you be working alone or with an association to get your message out? There can be power in numbers. If your professional child care association agrees on the same media objectives then you can share resources to accomplish the same goals.

Before you begin to offer story ideas to the media, it is important to understand what is news. To the reporter, *news is something new that has happened or new information that is learned*. Use the media for news, not to publicize your business or service. Most media sources have space to announce new businesses or services. These are usually located in the business section.

People in the media are people, just like you and me. They care about their community and are not out to get you. Developing relationships with your media contacts is important. If you don't spend the time to keep in touch, you should not be too surprised when reporters do not pay attention to your once a year media event.

Working with the media isn't difficult, yet you do need to know certain protocols. For example, calling a reporter who is on a deadline is like telling a child care professional he or she is a babysitter. It is a faux pas. Remember you want to develop a relationship so learn something about the media culture.

- Determine who will be the spokesperson or if there will be different spokespersons for different occasions. Will the spokesperson be different from the media contact? If you are working with different organizations, identify their communications persons and their protocols for working with the media. If you are working with the Department of

Social Services on a media campaign, you would not want to speak for DSS without approval.

- Use audio and video media with print media. People differ in how they best take in information. By using different mediums you will increase the chance of reaching broader populations. Media outreach can be matched to various target audiences, for example radio spots for adolescent parents could be played on teen radio stations.
- Using your community's stated or unstated media protocols. This can be done by simply calling the receptionist at the daily newspaper and asking for the name of the education editor and when he or she is not on a deadline, or by calling the local radio station and asking who handles Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and whether they prefer PSAs on tape or in writing.
- Become familiar with the media in your area. Read local newspaper sections, watch local TV programs, listen to local radio programs. Your familiarity with newspaper sections, TV special segments, and radio programs will help you to discern the most appropriate avenues. This will also make you more knowledgeable about which reporters, talk show hosts, or disc jockeys may be more interested in a story such as yours. Members of your association are a wonderful resource of information about potential media programs and contacts. Ask the members about the different media resources they know of and what programs and newspapers they keep up with regularly. Ask association members to clip relevant newspaper articles or tape programs. Keep a scrap book of press clips.
- A spokesperson's role is not to answer the reporter's questions; it is to make your message public. Decide the primary message you want to communicate. This is called a single overriding communication objective or SOCO. For example your SOCO might be, "Quality child care makes welfare reform work." Once your SOCO is developed, write it out in ten or more different ways. When the reporter asks you a question, work the message into your response.
- It is okay to say, "I do not know." Never give false information or make up information. You can always offer to find out that information and get right back to the reporter. You want to establish yourself as a credible source.

When I was in undergraduate school I went to my state's legislative session with several other students to learn how to advocate for children from the pros. I can recall being told what an important job advocating is, for we need to be the voice for the young who can not speak up for their needs. Influencing and informing the public about the needs of young children and child care providers is an important part of your profession. By learning how to work with the media, then by doing it, you have the potential to impact decisions that will effect our nation's children and those who care for them.

Using the television, newspaper and radio can be an effective way to publicize your message. The potential to reach many people, including those in rural areas, makes the media a powerful tool. For those reasons media outreach should be carefully considered as part of your organization's program.



## HOW A SUPPORT GROUP CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN A CHILD CARE PROVIDER

Elaine Daniels, Member

The Circle of Child Care Providers (Fenton & Linden areas)  
Genesee County

At a recent family child care support group meeting, we had discussed the definition of the word "support." Webster defines this word as follows:

*"To endure bravely or quietly, to promote the interests or causes of, to uphold or defend as valid or right, to be an advocate, to argue or vote for, assist, help, to act with or maintain, to hold up or serve as a foundation, bear a load, to keep from fainting, yielding, or losing courage, and to give comfort."*

We then tried to see the ways in which our group works toward accomplishing these goals.

1. *To endure bravely or quietly.* Sometimes this professional side to the child care business is very difficult. We must protect our child care families, both parents and children, by exercising confidentiality with personal information. We must also do the same with information about other child care facilities and other businesses. Most have worked hard to build a positive reputation in the community, which can be damaged quickly by negative comments.
2. *To promote the interests or causes of.* We do this through our monthly meetings, speakers, and activities. We encourage involvement, input, and suggestions for improvement. We share ideas through handouts, newsletters and talking with each other.
3. *To uphold or defend as valid or right; an advocate.* We attempt to keep up-to-date with legislative issues which have included zoning and licensing concerns. Recently, our efforts have been to preserve reimbursement from the food program.
4. *To argue or vote for, assist, help.* Business meetings are necessary to accomplish the goals of any group. We also offer assistance through a lending library that offers a variety of books, videos, and other resources to all providers. We also assist one another through a referral system and by sharing equipment and ideas.
5. *To act with or maintain.* We count on the attendance of our providers at monthly meetings to help us maintain our organization. We attempt to help all feel that they are important by respecting each other's ideas and feelings. Our phone callers also help maintain communication and support throughout our group.
6. *To hold up or serve as a foundation, bear a load.* Again our monthly meetings and executive meetings help to act as a foundation for this group. Willing

workers for special projects help bear the load and make them a success.

7. *To keep from fainting, yielding, or losing courage; give comfort.* We need to really listen to others in our group and to help work toward possible solutions. We can offer suggestions that have worked for us and share resources. One who cares enough to listen and to understand can give much comfort.

Because our group has been in existence since 1988, we wanted to evaluate its success and how it has impacted providers. We asked the providers to write their reasons for their faithful attendance at our support group. Besides information, speakers, socialization, sharing ideas, problem-solving, encouragement, mentoring, and involvement in group activities, the main reason was the caring support they receive from the group. This genuine caring attitude is the "glue" that holds our support group together and is offered to all providers anytime, anywhere. We are learning to **BE** the difference — to be true caregivers by giving caring support to other providers whenever needed so that they can give loving care to their child care children and families. Without this support, several providers doubted that they would have remained in this type of work. However, with this support, providers leave our meetings feeling good about their profession and themselves.



## **RURAL SUPPORT GROUPS — THEY CAN AND DO HAPPEN**

*Faith Pearce, Group Day Care Provider  
Livingston County*

We are a group of child care providers in a rural area who provide child care in 5 school districts in two different counties. Our support circle was formed around 1988 by calling providers and then asking them if it would be something they would be interested in. The response was great and meetings were held in a different provider's home each month. After many meetings and trying to find addresses in the dark, especially winter months, someone suggested we meet at the same place each month with a good central location. I then volunteered my home each month and it has worked out extremely well for all our members.

We choose board members each year: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Chairpersons for the Advertising, Phone-Calling and Legislative committees. Three of our members volunteer to be phone callers and call our members each month to remind them of our meetings. This takes time, but seems to keep reminding members to come join us. The advertising job consists of ads in local papers, keeping our ad on local cable network, ads in local phone books, and using all the resources we have to keep our name in the public eye. All and all it is a total joint hard-working group of providers who work together to keep our support group growing and learning.

We operate on donations only. Some activities we have been a part of are: Easter bunny at local businesses, Santa Claus at McDonald's, game booth at Linden's Summer Happening, float in the parade, fun fair at a local church with Easter bunny, face painting, music, Buster the Bus, Saf-T child fingerprinting, games and of course food, donated by pizza places and McDonald's. At the local restaurant, we have had placemats with our providers' business cards on them.

During the Month of the Young Child®, we will be having a Learning Fun Fair for parents, to let them know what goes on in their child's day. It will be held at a local church with speakers brought in to describe the children's activities.

We have handed out our emergency cards, parent's checklist, coloring sheets and other goodies at various functions.

We collect information from our members on any openings they may have and then notify 4C. We then refer parents to 4C.

At our Christmas party, we gave our providers a sheet of paper and asked them to write down the reasons they continue coming to our meetings. The number one response was the support they receive from all the providers.

If you have any questions about starting a support group, feel free to call me at (810) 629-3933.

## **STRONG FAMILIES/SAFE CHILDREN: HOW CHILD CARE PROVIDERS CAN PARTICIPATE**

*Libby Richards, Planner  
Genesee County Strong Families/Safe Children*

"Strong Families/Safe Children" is a statewide initiative prompted by the passage of the federal Family Preservation and Support Services program in 1993. This legislation is aimed at promoting family strength and stability through programs that are more coordinated, integrated, and responsive to family needs. It became the catalyst for Michigan to design a collaborative planning process to determine the best way to use the new funding available to the state.

The planning process first involved getting input from a diverse group of citizens through public hearings, written testimony and focus groups. From this input, the consensus of the 46 members of the State Advisory Group was that the Strong Families/Safe Children initiative presented a unique opportunity to strengthen and change family-focused, prevention services for children and families.

The Advisory Group decided the initiative would emphasize three system changes:

1. Soliciting consumer leadership as well as consumer interest;
2. Collaboration among agencies;
3. Services that are both flexible and community based.

The Advisory Group also recommended that the limited funds would initially go to 28 counties with the greatest need. However, the state plans to commit additional resources to phase in all Michigan counties over a three year period.

How does this process involve child care providers and child care services?

While it will differ in each county, it is clear that child care is a critical community based prevention service. It is important, therefore, that local family and center child care providers are involved in the planning process. In Genesee County, for example, providers and consumers have been involved on committees working on achieving goals related to reduction of foster care placements, increased adoptions, immunizations and grandparent parenting supports.

It is important to become familiar with what your county is doing with this initiative. Learn how you can participate in the process. It is an excellent opportunity to advocate for child care services while networking with others concerned with child and family needs. This will support real changes in the service delivery system.

For your information, call the director of your local county Department of Social Services or Laurie Ludington, state coordinator of Strong Families/Safe Children at 517-338-6081.



## **PROVIDER SUPPORT GROUPS: ENHANCING QUALITY CARE**

*Sharon Bolthouse, Child Care Specialist  
Office for Young Children (4C)  
Ingham County*

Support groups or teams enhance quality care because they give providers and directors a means to learn new skills related to professionalism, business practices, and leadership skills. They provide some informal training and personal encouragement and sense of community. In our area, the resource and referral counselors participate as a team member. The meeting provides an opportunity to learn the needs of providers and the families they serve. Listening to the concerns of the providers helps in the development of meaningful training opportunities to improve the quality of care. The groups are worth the effort required on the part of the participants and facilitators.

Because the job of caring for children can be an isolating profession, many providers and center directors look forward to regularly scheduled meetings with peers in a relaxed setting. The groups have natural benefits of provider relationships, and mentoring relationships which help lower burnout. They give providers and directors confidence in the decisions they make and provide a means of collaboration for joint activities.

Lansing area child care center directors are invited to meet on a monthly basis for two hours in the afternoon. A mini-newsletter is sent each month with information about the meeting, announcements of interest related to conferences, training opportunities and equipment for sale. This group is called "Directors' Rap" and the format is usually informal with participants sharing ideas, resources and skills. They meet in centers, public buildings or restaurants. A staff person from the Office of Young Children writes the newsletter and acts as a facilitator at meetings.

The other groups in our service area are formed by geographic areas but providers are invited to attend any group to find the one that best matches their personality and interests. Some of the groups include both family child care and center staff and directors. Each group sets its own agenda which is provider-centered. Participants volunteer to contact resource people or speakers for programs.

Many groups have been the natural outgrowth of a training series where providers formed relationships and suggested continuing in an organized way. New providers are informed at orientations or by mail of the groups that meet in their area. Groups that have a telephone tree are better able to maintain enthusiasm and energy for meetings. In the Lansing area, the Office for Young Children mails notices and maps.

The following are a suggested list of topics for provider meetings:

### ***Children***

- Ages and stages (what to expect from toddlers, 2, 3, 4 year olds, etc.)
- Kindergarten readiness
- Dealing with difficult behaviors (crying, biting, eating problems, aggressive behavior)
- Guidance and discipline techniques
- Toilet training
- Helping children cope with stress (divorce, moving, new siblings, changes)
- Children's Fears
- Helping children cope with a violent society and war toys; superhero play; TV
- Evaluating children for behavioral or medical problems and Project Child Find
- Caring for children who have special needs
- Health and safety issues in day care and communicable diseases
- Outdoor safety

### ***Curriculum and Program***

- Planning activities using a theme
- Appropriate toys and activities to fit the child
- Infant and toddler activities; school-age activities
- Songs, fingerplays and chants
- Field trips; art activities; dramatic play; science activities; cooking with children
- Using puppets as learning tools
- What to look for in children's books
- Activities using children's literature
- Outdoor activities
- Creative use of space and learning centers

### ***Parents***

- Parent/provider communication; parent contracts; parent interviews; parent policies; tuition and delinquent payments
- Working with children of teen parents

### ***Business Aspects***

- Recordkeeping; taxes; organizing FDC files; contracts
- Substitute caregivers
- Food programs
- What goes into a parent handbook; policies; disenrolling a child
- Marketing skills as providers
- Insurance
- DSS payments
- Going from FDC to group day care

### ***Personal***

- Blending family and business
- Stress management; self-esteem

### ***Miscellaneous***

- First aid; CPR
- Child protection law implications
- CDA
- Month of the Young Child activities
- Resource people (such as Dairy Council)

## MONTH OF THE YOUNG CHILD® — 1996

Barb Monroe, MOYC Chairperson

You are invited to join in a month long celebration highlighting the needs and rights of young children and their families. The month of April is designated Month of the Young Child® (MOYC). The goal of the Month of the Young Child is to increase public and private awareness of children's issues. Small voices are hard to hear, but when many voices join together, on behalf of children, we can make a difference!

The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children coordinates a statewide public awareness campaign, working in partnership with a coalition of Michigan public and private agencies, organizations and corporations. Across the state, children's advocates promote and implement MOYC activities. The key action word this year is **CELEBRATE** — celebrate children.

The Month of the Young Child Steering Committee is organizing a variety of activities and events that will help promote the statewide celebration. Each week in April will focus on specific important issues and areas that effect children.

The Focus Weeks for MOYC 1996 are:

Week 1	April 1 – 6	Celebrating Early Childhood Educators and Quality Education
Week 2	April 7 – 13	Celebrating Healthy Children and Families
Week 3	April 14 – 20	Celebrating Public and Private Partnerships
Week 4	April 21 – 27	Advocating on Behalf of Children and Families



- **Early Childhood Professional Recognition Day, April 2, 1996.** This is a day dedicated to thanking early childhood professionals for their dedication to the education and welfare of children. Please take time to thank those who work on behalf of children and families.
- **YMCA National Healthy Kids Day, April 13, 1996.** occurs in the Focus Week, Celebrating Healthy Children and Families. In many communities, YMCA's will sponsor activities and provide information about health issues.
- **Kids at the Capitol Day, Wednesday, April 24, 1996.** Hundreds of children, their families and child advocates will come to our state capitol for activities and entertainment. The goal is to increase legislative awareness of children's issues. Governor Engler and state legislators are invited to join in the celebration. To help increase legislative awareness, the following two projects coincide with Kids at the Capitol Day.
- **The Doll Project.** Life-size, decorated and dressed cardboard dolls, with true stories attached, are distributed to the Governor and all state legislators. These life-size reminders are intended to encourage legislators to support children.
- **The Scrapbook Project** shows selected public officials that high quality children's programs exist in their communities. The scrapbooks, through photographs, written commentary and children's artwork, display examples of high quality early childhood education and care.

The Doll Project and the Scrapbook Project can be used at the local level to heighten awareness of governing boards, school boards, businesses and service organizations.

- **Purple Ribbons** will be seen everywhere! Wear or display a purple ribbon to show commitment to and support of Michigan's children.

There's no time like today to begin thinking of ways you can join this celebration. Collaborate with early childhood professionals to create a unified show of support for our most valuable asset, our children.

### *Celebrate Children!*

For more information about MOYC, contact:

Month of the Young Child  
Michigan Association for the Education  
of Young Children  
4572 S. Hagadorn Road, Suite 1-D  
East Lansing, Michigan 48823  
800-336-6424  
517-336-9700

## HELP! YOUR CENTER IS CLOSING

Garth Ash, President, Toddler Success, Inc.  
Midland County

*Help! Your center is closing. Now what? What are you going to do?*

*One group of parents couldn't find other child care that met its needs. Here is how they resolved their dilemma.*

Five sets of parents who were attending the closing center partnered together to maintain the existing service. Although in the beginning this appeared to be a simple undertaking, we soon realized our journey had just begun.

The journey seemed to be a roller coaster ride, full of ups and downs: acquiring staff and equipment, garnering support from the church in which the facility is located, getting support from community businesses, educating ourselves in child care center requirements, having a cleaning party and more. All of this was

accomplished in a very short six week period to ensure no interruption of service.

If it had not been for the team work of our parents, we would not have been able to accomplish so much. We were able to divide the work into manageable tasks.

Obtaining a child care center license is a lot of work, but if the appropriate parties are enlisted up front, they can make the task easier. The Department of Social Services, Childcare Concepts, Michigan 4C, and other nonprofit centers provided assistance. These resources helped us to succeed.

Now that our service is underway, there have been many rewarding elements. The children are thrilled with the new equipment and activities. The parents have commented positively about the new service. The staff has taken on more responsibility and ownership, providing greater job satisfaction. These rewards have made all of our hard work very worthwhile.

We are proud of our accomplishment and feel the community has gained an improved center.

## RESOURCES: ADVOCACY

*An Advocate's Guide to the Media*, Children's Defense Fund, 122 C. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20001, 1-800-628-8787.

"Advocacy: Committing to Improve the Quality of Care — Encouraging Parents as Advocates," Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., *Pre-K Today*, 11 & 12, 1991.

"Early Childhood Advocacy," Joan Lombardi, Ph.D., *Pre-K Today*, 11 & 12, 1990.

"Finding a Way to Serve," Shirley O'Brien, *Childhood Education Annual Theme Issue*, 1991.

*Guiding Principles for the Development, Analysis & Implementation of Early Childhood Legislation*, NAEYC, 1509 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20036-1426, 1-800-424-2460.

"Parents, Teachers & Directors have their Say on Raising Teachers' Wages," *Child Care Information Exchange*, May/June, 1992.

*Starting a Child Care Center in Wayne County: A Guide to Successful Operation*, Child Care Coordinating Council of Detroit/Wayne Co., Inc.

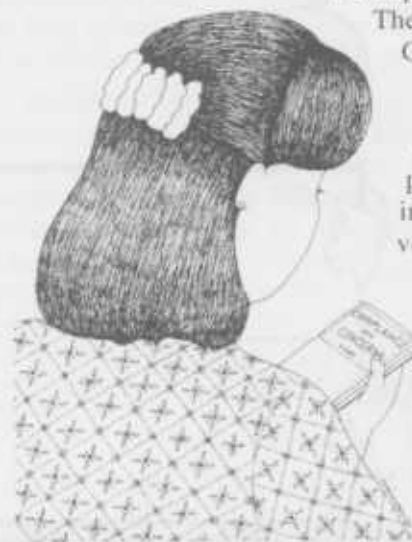
*Strategic Media*, Communications Consortium Media Center, 1333 H Street, N.W., 11th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005, 1-202-682-1270.

*Working with the Media: A Handbook for Informing the Public about Early On Michigan*, published by the Michigan 4C Association/Early On Public Awareness & Central Directory Project. Copies may be purchased at Kinkos in East Lansing, 1-517-337-9669.

## VIDEOS AVAILABLE THROUGH YOUR LOCAL LICENSING OFFICE

*Complaints and Concerns* is a 14-minute video produced by the Division of Child Day Care Licensing. Complaints and concerns are bound to come up in your child care business — they're simply a part of doing business. This video explains the licensing complaint procedure.

A companion brochure "When There are Complaints and Concerns about Child Care," has been developed. The video along with the brochure helps provide an understanding of what licensing investigates, and why and how the Department and providers can work together with parents for the protection of children. This video may be borrowed free of charge through your licensing office or purchased for \$10.00. Copies of



the complaint brochure are also available. Don't wait until you have a complaint to try to understand the process.





## PROVIDERS CORNER

Sheryl Kost, Family Day  
Care Home Provider

As a Day Care Provider with a backyard pool, I was asked to attend a Child Day Care Licensing Administrative meeting. The meeting was to discuss rule issues regarding water activities in Day Care Homes and Centers. Sue Young, the Licensing Consultant who phoned me, stated, "They want to pick your brain." I'm sure you can imagine what I was thinking at that point. My thoughts ran from fear of having to speak to a room filled with the Child Day Care Licensing Supervisors from all over the state (What if they disagreed with me, what then?) to feeling honored that I was the one being asked to attend.

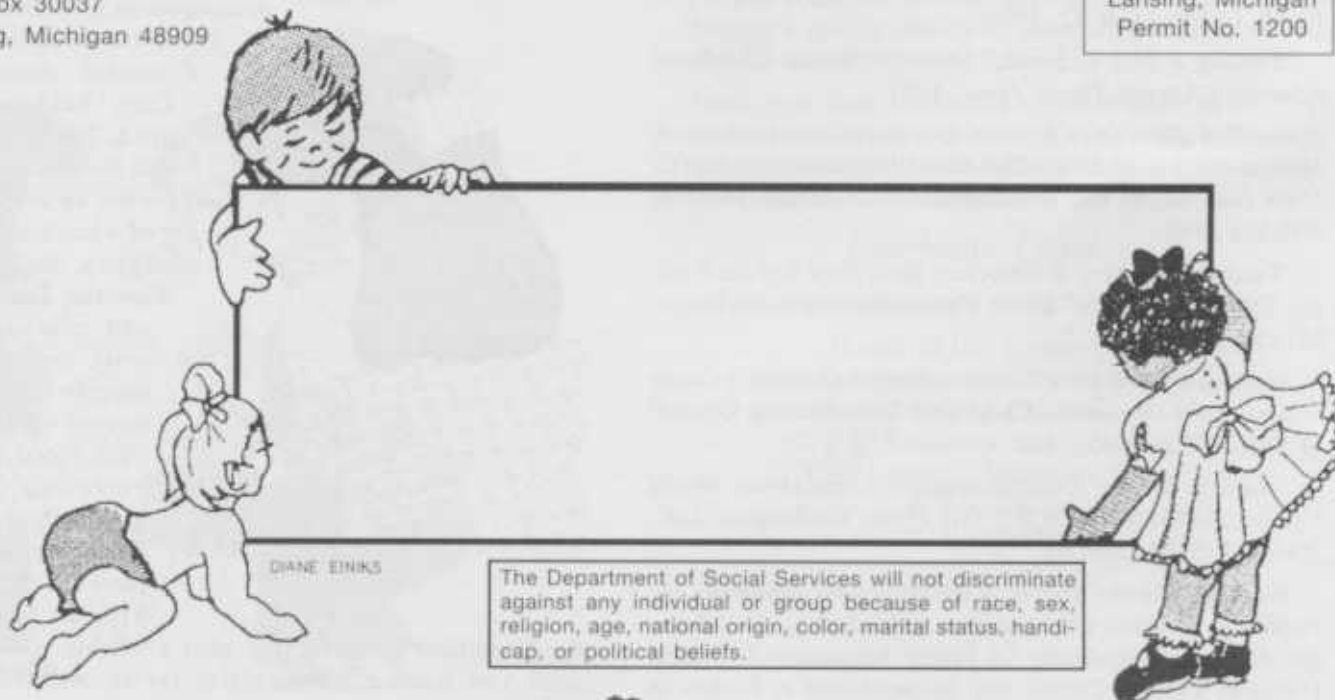
The nervousness I felt when I first arrived, was soon dispelled. Everyone went out of her way to make me

feel welcome. The whole experience was very enlightening. I think providers and parents quite often take for granted the research that has to be done by the Division of Child Day Care Licensing before a rule can be enacted. The rules are meant to protect both the children and the providers alike.

I chose to be a day care provider so I could stay at home with my own children. In doing this my husband and I rarely ever had to worry about giving over the responsibility of our children's safety and well-being to someone else. Though this isn't an option for everyone, I'm presently being honored with the privilege of caring for my first grandchild. This will not always be the case. There will come a time when someone else will be proving the care for my grandson and any other grandchildren I may have someday. For this reason I would like to commend all the people at the Division of Child Day Care Licensing for the work they do to keep the children safe.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
Bureau of Regulatory Services  
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P.O. Box 30037  
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